

Colossians Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. Let me open with a question: Would you like to change your life for the better without having to try? Paul effectively tells us how by explaining how Christianity works. That leads to my lesson title, "Why do Christians act that way?" The secret isn't to trying harder, but by us letting God work through us. Us Christian veterans need that constant reminder because we're constantly trying to prove our worth to God versus letting Him work through us. Then we "just naturally change for the better". This chapter explains how it occurs and gives examples of changed lives!
 - a) As I stated in the last lesson, there's nothing Christians must do to earn our salvation. Yes we must believe Jesus is God, died for our sins and believe He's in charge of our lives. I want you to grasp is if we truly believe that, we just naturally change. I've watched many a life be dramatically changed once people grasp those concepts about Christianity. That is because when we make that commitment, God literally takes up residence inside of us as He changes our lives for the better. His goal is to make believers into a living witness for Him. That's why change occurs. If it's our desire to please God, then we'd want to live as He desires. The fascinating thing to me is it's not by willpower, but only by God being a part of our lives. I'll explain that as we go through this final chapter of this book.
 - b) This chapter only has have verses specifically on the topic of behavior. Then it gives us a bunch of examples of changed lives as examples. In effect, this is a continuation from the last chapter as Paul gives us examples of how to be a good witness for Jesus. Again, it isn't a matter of trying harder. We'll only act this way by letting God work in our lives. I'm reminded of the classic expression, "Fake it until you make it". That means to make the effort to act a certain way, and over a period of time we get used to it. Letting God work in our lives is all about using our lives as a living witness for Him. It also happens to be the best way to live life, but to me, that's just a bonus! Since we're going to live forever in His presence, we start by being a witness for Him now and that's the point here!
2. Most of this chapter is in effect "the ending credits". First let me give the practical reasons why it's given in this letter and then, I'll explain how it ties to the theme of Christian behavior. Let's begin by realizing Paul wrote this letter under house arrest. He was probably chained to guards as he dictated the letter. That means someone is writing it down. It also requires a need for people to deliver it. If a group of people (i.e., a local church) got this letter, a natural question is "Who is it from and how do we know it's from him?" It's necessary to mention those working with Paul in Rome under house arrest as the one's traveling to deliver it to recipients hundreds of miles away. Apparently, this was a "multiple letter" delivery. The Colossians letter was being delivered along with two other letters at the same time. Historians are pretty positive the letter to Philemon, the letter to the Colossians and maybe even the Ephesian epistle are among what's being delivered. My simple point is this is a "package deal". Paul's sending out a bunch of letters that all became part of the bible and he names those involved in the writing and delivery process.
 - a) Also keep in mind there was no "pony express" to deliver mail. Letters had to be brought by messengers and deal with the dangers of the road. Yes, the Romans had checkpoints throughout their road system, but those checkpoints included looking out for criminals or those on the Roman "watch list". Even the delivery of this letter was a dangerous mission as this letter had to travel from Paul's jail cell in Rome all the way to an area that's part of Turkey today, where the city of Colosse is located. It's just another proof of how the bible letters were persevered. The original manuscripts are long gone, but we still have copies of these letters going back to the early second and third centuries.
 - b) All of this is proof of validity. We also have the writings to this day of church leaders in the 2nd Century. They accepted them as "bible worthy" and considered them distinct from their own writings, long before the bible was formally canonized.

3. OK enough on validity, let's talk a little about the people listed here and more importantly why it is we should care. It's not just saying these guys are in the bible, so that's that. They are here to remind us how Christians are to continue to do the work of the Gospel. That means a big group effort is needed! Christianity is never meant to be "One million solo acts for Jesus". God desires a group effort to make a difference for Him. It's much more than say, being with a big shot as they are doing God's work. It's much more than carrying out other's work. The way God gets involved in the process is through prayer. I'm willing to bet for example, that if it wasn't for the prayers of the people mentioned in this letter, that major problems would occur with the deliveries of letters as Paul desires. He also asked for prayer to continue the work of the ministry. Paul is well aware that it's not his brilliant speaking that leads people to Jesus, but God working in people's hearts to lead them to Him. My simple point is God intends all believers to get involved in the effort as to make a difference for Him. That's part of Christian behavior and that's why all of "this" is here in the final part of this letter.
- a) Enough generalities. Time for a quick discussion of the people listed. Some of these we know a lot about. Some very little. Let me summarize some facts quickly so when you're studying other books of the bible you can say, "Wait a minute I remember that guy!" Just as God wants them to have credit for their part, yes God wants to give us credit for using our lives to make a difference for Him. OK, let's begin:
 - b) The first is Tychicus. Apparently the church in Colosse won't know who he is, so Paul is sending him to give them "Paul news". He's mentioned in Acts 20:4 as one of the men who traveled with Paul as a missionary. He's also mentioned in the Ephesians "credits". That's why many scholars think the Ephesian letter was also delivered as part of this package.
 - c) Next is Onesimus. If you've ever studied Paul's one chapter letter to Philemon, Onesimus was a runaway slave who Paul helps. Philemon was Onesimus's slave owner. My point is the letter to Philemon was delivered to him as part of this package by his former slave.
 - d) Then we get a man named Aristarchus. He's mentioned several times in Acts as another of Paul's travel companions. He's also mentioned in the ending credits of Philemon, which is another reason why scholars argue the letters were delivered together.
 - e) By the way, there is no final quiz on all these names. I'm just going through all of them to show how the Christian church works together. OK, time for a "biggie":
 - f) Then we get "Mark the cousin of Barnabas". This is the author of the Gospel of Mark. His name is not listed in that gospel but the 2nd century church leaders who personally knew them state it was "John Mark" or "Mark" for short. This guy traveled with Peter for years, and that's where Mark got his information. He deserted Paul on his first missionary trip, but apparently they "made up" as he works with Paul here. Now you know.
 - g) Then comes a handful of names, with little cross references. The exception includes a man named Epaphras. I mentioned him back in Colossians Chapter 1. He's from Colosse and I suspect it's his idea to send this letter in the first place, as Paul never went to that city. It's a proof that Paul (and us) should care for all believers even the one's we've never met!
 - h) The last name I want to mention is another "biggie". Luke wrote the book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. His name isn't mentioned in either book, and again the church fathers of the 2nd century verified it was Luke. Anyway, other than Luke hinting in Acts that he was a part of Paul's missionary journeys, the reference to Luke here in the Colosse credits is the only other reference we have to who he was.
4. Finally let me say, I don't think God's going to ask us in heaven, "OK to get in here, name all of Paul's "gang" in the Colosse letter". I'm sure the only question we'll get is, "Do you trust that Jesus paid the complete price for your sins and what did you do with that information?" Anyway, that's a good summary of this final chapter. With that said, let's spend a little time learning about what the bible teaches us about how God expects us to live as a witness for Him. Also, since this is the last lesson, my biography is given on the last page of this lesson. Thanks for reading and it's time to start on the details. Here we go:

5. Chapter 4, Verse 1: Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.
- a) Every time I write one of these bible studies, I try to keep in mind that some are reading this for the first time. I mention that because many people don't realize the chapter breaks were not added until a millennium after the New Testament was written. Therefore, when we start a new chapter, it's important to back up and look at the previous set of verses as a topic is often a continuation of thought from the previous chapter. That's definitely what's happening here. In the previous chapter, Paul got into a discussion of "groups". All that means is God has certain expectation of groups. For example, He expects husbands to act a certain way with their wives. God wants wives to act a certain way with their husbands. It's not "act this way or off to hell you go". As I stated in the introduction, it's a matter of us giving our hearts to Jesus and over time God changes us to be better spouses.
 - i) From the topic of marriage, Paul then jumps into the topic of families. In effect he cites one of the Ten Commandments to discuss how the relationship should work between one's parents and one's children. It's how God changes us that way too!
 - ii) Then the final four verses of Chapter 3 deal with the issue of slavery. Realize when Paul write this book, about two thirds of the Roman world were slaves. Paul didn't work to change that issue because he had "bigger fish to fry" preaching the gospel. However, realize that the rise and growth of Christianity in that world the Roman world eventually lead to the end of slavery there. As Christianity grew the concept of slavery faded out as again, God works in the hearts of people to get us to act in ways that are pleasing to Him. In relatively modern times, some devout Christians worked hard to end slavery through most of the world.
 - iii) Anyway, I get into all of that as it existed when Paul wrote this letter and therefore it was a good idea to teach how people could be good witnesses for Jesus even if one had to deal with that topic. The closest analogy we have today is relationships between bosses and employees. While it's not a perfect comparison, many of those principals do apply here.
 - iv) All of that leads to Verse 1 of Chapter 4. Paul gives one more line on how masters are to deal with slaves. Ok let me ask the question none of us have the answer to: Why break the chapter here? If the last few verses of Chapter 3 deal with that issue why not include this verse in that chapter? Don't know. I know this final chapter deals with how we're to be a good witness for Jesus and this first verse does fit in that theme of how God changes us for the better. It shows that if God can change a heart of a slave owner for the better, think what He can do through you and me!
 - b) OK enough of that. Let's talk about Verse 1 itself. First notice that Paul doesn't say, "Hey if you've got slaves working for you, go let them free and God will provide for you!" Paul knew his letters were circulated and it was hard enough to be a Christian without having riots occur because "Christians are trying to change the way the Roman Empire governs". The Romans had two basic rules, "Pay your taxes and don't rebel against Rome". Anyone living in that empire were pretty much free to do what they wanted as long as those rules were not get violated. Rebelling against slavery could be interpreted as how Christians were rebelling against Rome. Therefore, Paul took a different tact, by saying if one has slaves, "treat them well". Think about how non-Christians would view this. They would say, "that guy has slaves like many others around us, but the slaves in that place aren't treated like others around here! My point is that Paul uses the prominent issue of slavery to say, "It exists, I don't like it, but let's be good witnesses for God in spite of it."
 - c) Therefore, if you've got slaves, do the right thing and treat them fairly. Not because it was a requirement to be good to slaves, but as a reminder that just as masters are accountable to God, so those masters should set a good example in how they treat others. Remember that Paul said both slaves and slave masters can be Christians. Let me expand on that:

- i) Slaves were essentially "property". They didn't have a lot of rights. A master can legally beat a slave as they were the property of their owners. Paul is saying there is a need to rise about that. Yes the law of that day said "x", but Christians need to go a step further, not just to obey the local law, but more importantly because as believers we're accountable to God with how we treat those "under us".
- d) OK, enough of ancient history. It's time to discuss how this affects us. Imagine if we ran a business and we have employees. Yes employees must do as their told and yes we cannot beat them. Employees have rights outside of their job. The important principal is we're accountable to God, and we need to keep that in mind in our business dealings. I'll give an example of a friend of mine. He's a devout Christian who works for a firm with many a believer and nonbeliever. It's not his job to fix all his fellow workers and convert all of them to Christianity. His job is to be a good witness for Jesus while doing his work. That would be the idea of doing his job, fairly, honorably, working hard and not violating how the bible teaches us to live while doing our work.
 - i) I know another person who's an elder in my former church. He's a partner in that he's one of the owners. Some years back he had to discipline one of his employees who was a devout Christian because that employee was telling others about Jesus on the job and caused disharmony there because he preached on the evil of sin.
 - a) When we're working, the issue is to be a witness for Jesus by working hard and being an example to others around us as one who's reputation is, "That person does their job and he or she is a good witness for Jesus because they put their lives where their mouth is".
 - ii) All of that leads me back to Verse 1. If we're in a work setting where people work for us or "under us", if we keep in mind that we're accountable to God for how we work, it motivates us to treat them right due to that accountability. Obviously this does not mean we can let some employee's "slouch" because their believers. We've got to do our jobs, because that's why we're there! My point is a one way we're a good witness for Jesus is by the way we treat people around us and that includes a work setting.
 - iii) This verse also doesn't mean we're to treat Christian employees better than other employees. It's simply the reminder that we're all accountable to someone. If we happen be the top of the "food chain" at our company, the head person must keep in mind that he or she is not only accountable to their board of directors as well as their customers, but also to God Himself. It's a matter of doing what's right since we're accountable to God not only in our home life, but our work life as well!
- e) OK over a page and half on Verse 1. Better pick up the pace!
- 6. Verse 2: Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
 - a) In Verses 2 through 6, Paul drops the "this group and that group" style, and returns to the issue of how all Christians should act! The focus of these five verses is on how we should pray. Remember that Paul's writing to people who didn't have bibles so as believers they wouldn't know how it is they're to pray to God and what they should be asking for.
 - b) A mistake many Christians make is we get right into a "Hey God, here's what I'd like You to do for me or this person right now". Yes there are times when it's ok to get right to the point, but there are other times where it helps us, (not God) to realize that our prayers should be a lot more than saying, "Hey God, here's my list, so be like Santa Claus and let's get rolling on this list!" Equally, I don't think of prayer as being formula like. It's not like it is a requirement to pray "exactly like this" to get our requests answered. It's also isn't that we have to pray a specific number of times to get God to answer our prayers. I do believe in repeated prayer requests, because often our perspective on what we ask God changes if we pray about an issue over and over again.
 - c) In summary He's God and we're not. We can ask, but He's free to say yes, no or not now!

- d) OK, enough of my prayer theology lecture, time to look at these specific verses and what's on Paul's mind when it comes to prayer. The first thing he says is we're to be watchful as well as thankful in prayer. So what does Paul mean by "watchful"? It simply means we're to be on the lookout for things to pray for. It's about seeing opportunities for God to work in the world around us and bringing those issues to Him.
- i) Let me give an illustration. If we see an elderly person struggle to get out of a car as an example, it's not necessary to pray first to help them. We should just offer to help because it's the right thing to do! I'm a big believer in offering to help and not forcing myself on people! I'm also a big believer that God never does for us what we can do for ourselves. In the Gospels Jesus never does a miracle in cases where a person or a group can do something without Him. For example When Jesus did raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus didn't say, "Hey grave stone (entrance) be gone as I need to get someone out of there". Instead, he asked for that grave covering to be removed so He could do what no man can do! When it comes to my prayer life I like to pray for God to do what I can't do myself or else to give me or others all of the ability to carry out His will!
 - ii) When it comes to prayer, we're free to ask anything we want. If we want effective prayer, then I think it's necessary to think, "Hey God here's what I or people can't do ourselves". Or, "Heavenly Father, give us the boldness to do Your will in what is needed in this situation!"
 - iii) Bottom line, Paul wants us to be watchful for good prayer opportunities around us as we go through our lives.
- e) The second issue is "thankfulness". Gratitude and a good mood go hand in hand. We all need to be grateful in order to appreciate life. Over the last year I've altered my prayer life to include things I'm grateful for. Even the most simple and basic things help to alter our mood. The idea is if we're grateful, we're more likely to be joyful as we appreciate all that God has done for us. My lesson theme had to do with God changing us from the inside. I would add that when we learn to thank Him for even the most simple ways that He has blessed our lives, we come out of it in a far better mood.
- i) If you haven't figured it out by now, what Paul's getting at, is prayer life should be far more than giving our "laundry list" to God. That's why He opened with saying we should be watchful for things to pray about, both good and bad and we should use part of our prayer time to be grateful for what He's done for us. All of that will lead us perfectly to Verse 3:
7. Verse 3: And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.
- a) Picture Paul under house arrest. Most likely, he's chained to guards while he is dictating this letter. Was it fair that Paul had to be in prison essentially for preaching the Gospel message? Of course not. Now notice carefully what Paul's praying for: It's not a "please pray that God will set me free so I can go retire on a tropical beach somewhere!" Paul understood that the purpose of living was to use our lives as a witness for Jesus. It is the realization on Paul's part that God called him and is using him to spread the message about Jesus. If I had to name one person in human history other than Jesus Himself who's made the biggest impact to change the course of human history, Paul wins hands down!
 - i) Because of the letters Paul wrote while being locked up and because of all those churches he started, God used him to change the course of human history and that has affected the world for the last 2,000 years. Could God have used someone else if Paul refused, of course! The point is Paul realized that God called him and then used his life based on that calling. That too is a great message for us to learn!
 - ii) OK good for Paul, what does that have to do with my prayer life? Glad you asked!

- iii) The first thing to keep in mind is that God doesn't reward us based on the number of people we save! It's not a "numbers" game. It's about using the gifts He's given us to make a difference for Him. It's about realizing God's given each us a fixed but unknown amount of time to live. Therefore, the best thing we can do with that time is find a ways to use it for His glory. When we figure out what we're good at, or what we enjoy doing and have a gift for it, and then use it for His glory, at that point we're using our lives for His glory. What if we've wasted our lives to date? What if we're stuck in a bad situation or laying in a hospital bed? Then we should be a good witness for God in that situation. We can't change our past, but we can learn from it. That's what living the Christian life is all about! God changes us so we have that desire to use our lives for His glory and we do make a difference for Him in the world around us.
 - iv) Believe it or not, that leads us right back to Paul. He wanted the people reading his letters to pray for him. Why? Because Paul understand that it wasn't his speaking ability or mannerism that got people to give their hearts to Jesus, it's only when we pray that God's spirit works. To quote another classic expression, "People are both the pawns and the prizes is life". That means that when we get saved that's when we become the prizes for God. When we pray and make a difference for Jesus, we are the pawns God uses to make a difference for Him. Paul got that and realized it is people praying for the Gospel message to be spread is the only reason people do accept the Gospel message.
 - b) I can't leave this section without sharing a great local story. In the area where I live there's a famous evangelist who lead multiple thousands of people to Jesus. It doesn't mean God can't use you or me to lead people to Jesus, but God uses him in a mighty way like He did use Billy Graham that way. Some of his friends I know personally. They joke that he can get up on stage and say, "I'm so sick I'm going to throw up, my dog died and I don't want to do this, but if anyone wants to accept Jesus, go ahead and people do". This story isn't a true one, but simply to show that God chooses to use some people on grand scale and He also chooses others to work on smaller scales and pray for people to be saved! Again, we must remember that heavenly rewards are not based on the size of our ministry or on the number of people we save, but simply on our loyalty to serve Him and make a difference for Him in the world around us!
 - c) Anyway, Paul didn't pray that he'd be set free, he asked for prayer that if it was God's will that He would still use Paul to preach the Gospel however that was done!
8. Verse 5: Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.
- a) Here is the last of Paul's "How Christians live differently speech" before Paul gets into the "ending credits" of this letter. Let's start with the word "outsiders". That's a code word for non-believers. Paul considers all believers to be part of one family. Those who aren't part of that family are outsiders. That leads to Paul's statement of "how do we make the most of every opportunity"? First I don't believe we have to preach the gospel basics all of the time. Being a good witness to others is about loving them in the sense of their needs as a priority over our own needs. If they ask why are you being so kind, you can say it's how I am called to live. Another example of opportunities is looking for ways to pray for others. I was just talking to a friend who's about to have surgery. I prayed for that person as my way of saying God cares about you and so do I. I find that even the hardest atheists will let you pray for them as they see it as positive "thoughts" for them. Yes there are times to give the Gospel message, but Jesus said the way people will know we're the "real thing" is by our love for them. I try to keep that in mind as I go through day.
 - b) Verse 6 says our conversation should be "full of grace with salt". What does that mean?

- i) The idea of being "full of grace" simply is about caring about others. The desire of all believers should be for others to get it. It doesn't mean we preach the basics on a 24/7 basis. It means we care about others and put their needs above our own. If God cared enough about us that He had other people pray for us and lead us close to Him, why don't we do the same for others.
 - ii) No I don't believe all people are saved. However none of us know who is and who isn't. Therefore, I try to be a good witness to all people at all times. I'm not perfect and I mess up as much as the next person. However, if I realize the fact that God's going to judge my life and I think about that fact, it's going to motivate me to want to be kind to others and lead them closer to Him. That's another good example of how God just "changes us" once we become believers. We start having a heart for other people and care for others who happen to be around us!
 - iii) OK then, what's the deal with salt? Suppose you eat some salty food like popcorn. What does it do to you? It makes you thirsty. It makes you crave more! The point is when we become a good witness for Jesus, it naturally makes people "thirsty" as they want to learn more. Let's face it, everyone's favorite subject is themselves. If we're focusing on caring about someone else, it's like "salt" in that they crave more!
 - c) Finally the verse says we'll know how to answer everyone. In the twenty years that I have been teaching this book, I get stumped every now and then. It's not usually the questions that can be answered by a bible verse, but situational ethics. I'm a big believer that if I can not answer a question, I promise to get back to that person after doing some homework. I am a fan of a few apologetic ministries that specialize in answering tough questions. Also its important to pray one's way through such questions, as God works through us to draw people closer to Him. Remember my expression that "people are the pawns and prizes in life", well, by God working through us and helping to answer tough questions, we are the "pawns" being used by God for His glory.
 - d) OK, the short version is if you don't have an answer, don't be afraid to say, let me get back to you and get some help. Also remember that a lot of people don't really want answers as much as they want to be heard! Years ago I learned the "Jack in the Box" technique. It's the fact that Jack in the Box trained employees to always repeat back orders to make their customers feel like they're being heard. Repeating back key points of what others tell us is a way of making people feel like someone cares what they have to say. The point is it's not always about coming up with the right answer. Sometimes it's simply a matter of the other person feel like their being heard.
 - e) All right then, onto the "ending credits". If you ever study Paul's letters, its amazing to see all the people he lists as people he's praying for there, or people he knows or those who're with him at the moment. Paul was not the "leave me alone " kind of guy. He loved people not only to preach the Gospel, but just to spend time with them. Personally, I always love to learn "what makes people tick" and always like talking to people. Yes I need to be alone at my keyboard for hours and write this stuff, but it's the interaction with others that gives me the strength to keep at it. Getting positive feedback from people motivates me to keep at it. Yes the Holy Spirit makes it possible, but interaction with other believers is needed for all people. Personally, I find the Christians who get "really weird" are the ones who spend way too much time alone. It's a danger that always scares me which is why I love to interact with other believers. OK then, with that speech out of my system, it's time for us to learn a little about those who are with Paul. Realize there are some "biggies" here as well as some bible trivia characters. In fact two of the people mentioned wrote two of the four gospels. OK, I'm stalling, let's get at it!
9. Verse 7: Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.
- a) The short version is he was a helper of Paul and is delivering this message!

- b) As I said in my introduction, we don't know a lot about this guy. We do know he became a part of the group that worked with Paul on his missionary journeys. I suspect it's a case where he got saved and thought, "Ok, I believe this, now what?" Tychicus then decided to use his life as a witness for Jesus by helping Paul in his missionary work. It's just another example of how God changes us from the inside to do things we wouldn't think of doing before we gave our lives to Jesus. This guy became a "bible trivia question" as he's listed for all eternity as someone who's used his life for God's glory. The one thing I've learned from studying my bible is that God loves when people obey Him and start to use their life to make a difference for Him. Just realize that when we in our own little way, make some sort of difference God cares as much for us as He does for Tychicus or even a Paul! It's not the size of our ministry that matters, but the fact we're doing what we're called to do and using our lives for His glory. OK, I'm tempted to break out in prayer here, but we've got a lot more people to cover here. Paul commends this person for being a good servant, and a devout Christian. Imagine having that on your resume for all of history!
- c) If that's not enough, Paul gives this guy another verse:
10. Verse 8: I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.
- a) Apparently Paul thought enough of Tychicus that Paul trusted him to tell the Colossians of what Paul is accomplishing for Jesus even while being under house arrest. I doubt that Tychicus had a great speaking ability. I suspect he's "just another Christian" that God can use to make a difference for Him. Remember that Paul has never been to Colosse. Yet he wanted to encourage them to grow in Jesus. It's not a ego thing for Paul. He is genuinely concerned that people grow in their faith and trust in Jesus. Paul figured that if believers came all the way from Rome to check on them and deliver this encouraging letter on how to live the Christian life would help them. Anyway, the point for you and me is that God is willing to work with anyone willing to give their hearts to Him and change us so He'll use us for His glory. OK then, time for the "back story" of the next person on the list.
11. Verse 9: He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.
- a) If you asked me to name my favorite chapter in the bible on the topic why God expects us to forgive others, the one chapter book of Philemon is that chapter. It's a wonderful story about asking a man to forgive his runaway slave and asking that owner to accept his slave as a freeman! You can tell right there how Paul feels about slavery! Anyway Onesimus is that runaway slaving delivering this letter.
- b) So how do we know it's the "same trip" as delivering the book of Philemon as delivering this letter to Colosse? We don't, but it's logical. It's a long way on foot from Rome all the way to Colosse and the surrounding area. Most likely Onesimus ran away for his life and ending up "hiding in the big city of Rome" when he encountered Paul and changed his life and use it for God's glory! So whether or not it's the same trip as his return home, he will tell the residents of Colosse how God took a runaway slave hiding from the authorities to a person being used by the God who created the Universe for His glory.
- c) If that isn't a great example of how God can use anyone, I don't know what is. If that isn't impressive enough for you, wait until you read the next "back story".
12. Verse 10: My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)
- a) First we get a brief mention of a man named Aristarchus. (Why do those from Greek and Roman backgrounds always have such tough names to pronounce!) As I stated about him in the introduction, he's mentioned several times in the book of Acts as another of Paul's travel companions. He's also listed in the "ending credits" of the book of Philemon, which is another reason why scholars argue the letters were delivered together. Anyway, Paul trusted this man, and off he went. OK then, time for one of the "biggie's":

- b) The main reason we know that the "Gospel of Mark" is written by someone named Mark is based on the writings (we still have to this day) of church leaders from the 2nd Century who studied under the original apostles. OK, time for the back story: Barnabas was Paul's travel companion on Paul's first (of at least three major) missionary journeys. Barnabas is the one who first introduced Paul to the church leaders and apostles in Jerusalem. On the first missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark along. Apparently, on that journey Mark "chickened out" at some point and left. When Paul was ready to take his second missionary journey, he and Barnabas split up because Paul didn't want Mark to join him due to his failure the first time. (See Acts 15:35-39.)
 - i) Anyway, that's not the end of the story for Mark. Once someone make the decision to commit their lives to Jesus, God can and will use people even if they "chickened out" at some point in their lives. Mark went on to be Peter's travel companion for a good while. Peter understood failure and getting a second chance. Apparently as Peter told Mark stories about his days with Jesus, that became the basis for the Gospel of Mark. If you don't know, Mark is also known as "John Mark" and is called Mark for short. Scholars believe he was subtly in the background in the gospel accounts when Jesus was on trial, but I'll save that story for another day.
 - ii) The point is the same Mark who quit on Paul at some point in the first missionary journey is now with Paul while he's under house-arrest and being used by God to deliver Paul's letters to distant lands. If that isn't a great proof that God gives us a second chance in life, I don't know what is!
 - c) Finally Paul tells the church in Colosse to welcome him. Maybe they might have read Acts of his desertion and could struggle with him. By Paul speaking well of Mark here in this letter that alone had to encourage Mark and publicly show Paul's forgiveness of Mark. It's a great "back story" and we got a few more fun one's to go.
13. Verse 11: Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- a) Here we start to get a few more mostly unpronounceable names along with someone who is also named Jesus, but called Justus probably to avoid any confusion when Paul went to preach about "The" Jesus. For those who don't know, there are a number of Old Testament people essentially with the same name as Jesus, as that word means "God is salvation". No I don't have a problem with anyone taking the name of Jesus today. It was a common one back then and it's a name to be respected. We don't much about Justus, other than the fact he had a Jewish background. Whoever he was, Paul compliments him as being helpful to him and a comfort to Paul in his time of being under arrest. Again, if nothing else, this is another proof that it's not the size of the ministry we have, but the fact we're being used to make a difference for the God who created us!
 - b) Next we get Epaphras. I talked about him back in Chapter 1. If you still think God cannot use anyone in a mighty way, remember that this is probably the only guy with Paul who's from Colosse. He inspired Paul to write a letter to a place he's never been to. Now this is being delivered to that city by the man who probably talked Paul into sending it. I believe that Paul didn't have a light shine over head saying, "write this letter, it'll be read one day by millions of people". I just think Paul saw a need to help other Christians and agreed to write it and that was that.
 - c) The text says that Paul says Epaphras sends his greetings. That's Paul's way of telling that church that "one of theirs" was involved in the process.
 - d) And here's the important part. Paul states that he's regularly praying for them. As I keep saying, God changes us from the inside. Epaphras had a heart for believers in his town!

- i) Stop and pause for a second. Think about your hometown or even your church. It may be news that your church or town as a problem with some controversy. Then you think, "Gee I hope this doesn't get worse, or glad I don't believe that". But to have a heart for one's town especially if we are a hundred of miles away is another proof of how God changes people's hearts once we use our lives for His glory!
 - e) Paul says he "wrested in prayer". What I suspect that means is he prayed as if his life was on the line. It probably means he worried about his town as he didn't know what's going on as far away as he was. It may also mean he wasn't sure how God was going to work in that town, so he "wrestled" as to how to pray over it. No matter what, it's not a problem to wrestle with prayer as I'm positive God appreciates our efforts for His will to work out in any given situation.
 - f) I suspect we get the answer to how he ended up praying. Paul wrote about that church to "stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured". Remember the main issue of this letter was that church's deviation from the truth of the Gospel message. Therefore, the perfect prayer is for that church to do what Paul quoted. Bottom line, the combination of Paul stating God's truth with Epaphras praying for them is what we should do in order to make a difference for God. In other words, if you want an effective ministry, not only do we have to the work, but prayer support is equally as necessary.
 - g) The final comment on Epaphras is that he was concerned for "Laodicea and Hierapolis". These were nearby cities. In other words, he was concerned that the gospel message still continue to be spread. Remember that Paul never preached in Colosse. I said in Chapter One that Epaphras heard Paul preach in Ephesus and "spread the word". Now he's got the heart to continue to see that message spread to other places. Obviously this is another case of God working in people's hearts to see further growth of the Gospel to other places!
 - h) The really good news is we're done with Epaphras.
14. Verse 14: Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.
- a) Yes, this is Luke as in the "Gospel According to Luke". Again, he never mentions his name in the book. He's also the author of Acts. If you read the introduction in the first chapter of each book, you can tell it's the same author. Again we have quotes by Christians in the early 2nd century who verified it was Luke. This verse is the only mention of him outside of his two books. A clue that Luke joined Paul on one of his missionary journeys is Luke's account changes the pronouns from "them" to "us" at one point in the book of Acts.
 - b) Notice these two guys didn't travel to deliver the letter. They simply stayed with Paul. So what were they doing there? For one reason Luke wrote about Paul's life, so I think he liked to work with Paul and help his needs. Let's face it as often as Paul got "beat up" as stated in the book of Acts having a doctor around is a necessity!
 - c) As to Demas his epilogue isn't as good. He's also mentioned in the letter to Philemon that he was with Paul when it was written. Another simple proof that the two letters got sent at the same time. Now for the bad news. The one letter Paul wrote near the end of his life is 2nd Timothy. In the final chapter of that book Paul said that Demas left "because he loved the world". That simply means he walked away from his faith.
 - i) That leads to the question: What about people who were devout Christians for a period of their life and walked away. Are they saved? First it's God's job to judge one's eternal salvation, so it's "not my business". Our job's to judge behavior which is what Paul did with this guy. Bottom line, work to make a difference for Jesus as we let God deal with questions are "above our pay grade".
15. Verse 15: Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.
- a) The city of Laodicea was near Colosse. The simple point is Paul had a heart for believers and he wanted them to know that Paul cares for them with this statement. It's Paul's way of saying that despite the problems they're having they're still Christians!

16. Verse 16: After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.
- a) As I have been stating throughout this lesson there was more than one letter that was part of this delivery. Realize there is no letter from Paul to the Laodiceans in the bible. Again, the theory is that this refers to the letter to the Ephesians, as the oldest copies we have of Ephesians don't actually name that place. Are we positive that's the case? Of course not, but it's a possibility to consider. The main thing is the letters meant to be part of the New Testament did.
 - b) Also notice that the letters were meant to be circulated. Paul asks that the letters be shared among the churches. Both the Ephesian and Colossian letters teach a lot of principals that can be shared and one can see that the letters should be circulated.
 - c) OK, two verses left.
17. Verse 17: Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."
- a) The only other mention of Archippus is that he's a church leader in Colosse. He might be the only person Paul knew who was living there because of Philemon. Anyway, we got a greeting to him to wrap up this letter. You can grasp how Paul cares for all believers just by the simple fact he says "hello" to the one person who's ministering to a home church at that time. It's more than saying "hello" Paul is encouraging him to keep doing what God called him to do, which we assume is to lead that church. OK then, time for Paul to wrap it up.
18. Verse 18: I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.
- a) Remember that Paul was chained to guards and was dictating this letter. I picture at this point Paul grabbing the letter and saying, "let me sign it myself". The original copy of it is long gone, but if we had it, I picture a big "Paul" signature (in the original Greek) here.
 - b) Paul's comment about "Remember my chains" is a simple reminder to the readers to pray for him that God may still use him for God's glory.
 - c) Then we get a standard greeting for Paul which is the "Grace be with you". That's simply a way of saying since we don't have to prove our worth to God, we rely upon His grace (that's unmerited blessings) to use our lives for His glory! It's a great way to end it as we use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. Since God works to change us, all we need to do is rely upon Him to work through us as we make the effort to use our lives to glorify God with our lives.
 - d) On that positive note, we'll end in prayer. Oh, and since this is the last lesson on the book, I've got my "ending credits" on the next page. Thanks as always for reading. John.
19. Heavenly Father, We don't know why You've called us to make a difference for You, but if we've committed our lives to serving You, then we have. If we believe Jesus is God and died for all our sins, the next step is to use our lives for His glory. The really good news is that once we make that commitment, God takes up residence inside of us and changes us so it becomes our desire to use our lives for His glory. Make it obvious to us, what You desire we do at this moment or as a next step that You desire of our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted me to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King vVersion (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #5 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have studied as I prepared these lessons. The specific commentaries on Colossians are listed first, and then bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Colossians by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Colossians by Bob Davis. They are available for free in MP3® format at <http://northcountrychapel.com/studies/>.
3. Commentary on Colossians by David Guzik. It is available for free in audio and text format. The web address is http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.htm Mr. Davis quotes a lot of famous authors from the 19th and 20th Century on these books and sometimes I refer to those quotes.
4. Commentary on Colossians by John MacArthur. Available for free in MP3® at www.gty.org
5. Commentary on Colossians by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>.
6. The English Standard Version Study Bible; Copyright (2005-2009) The Standard Bible Society. The version itself is copyrighted 2008 by Crossway Bibles, a publication of "Good News Publishers".
7. The Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every bible verse. It is available through Zondervan. Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this same source. The actual text that is copied and pasted is taken from this source.
8. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm.
9. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229.
10. I also refer sometimes to J.P. Moreland apologetic ministry which is at www.jpmoreland.com and Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at www.str.org
11. My apology if I have quoted someone else and I have forgotten to include them here.